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DANTE: AN ELEMENTARY BOOK FOR THOSE WHO SEEK IN THE GREAT POET THE TEACHER OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE. By Henry Dwight Sedgwick. New Haven, Yale University Press, 1918. Pp. xiii, 187.

The author describes his work (Preface, p. xi) as 'a primer which leaves learning one side, and busies itself with Dante as a poet and a believer in eternal righteousness.' It is not really so bad as the reference to learning would seem to promise. Mr. Sedgwick has tried to prepare himself for his task, and has measurably well succeeded: his Suggestions for Beginners (pp. 173-9) contain a good list of books. A better translation of the *Divina Commedia* than either of those there recommended is that in the edition by A. J. Butler; it is unfortunate that the publishers (Macmillan) have chosen not to render this again accessible by reprinting the *Hell* and the *Purgatory*. The translation by Tozer (Oxford Press) should likewise have been mentioned.

The first chapter (Dante's Fame) attempts, not unsuccessfully, to place Dante in the literature of the world; but among the general observations one may query the following. Can Euripides (p. 2), whom Browning called 'the human,' really be termed 'remote' from us? Is there any advantage to our understanding of Dante as poet, or to the cause of eternal righteousness, in saying (p. 3) that Macaulay 'somewhere' contends 'that Milton's reputation would stand higher had *Paradise Lost* ended with the fourth book?' For the sake of the eternal fitness of things, why not give the precise reference to Trevelyan's *Macaulay* (1877, 2.200): 'Milton's fame would have stood higher if only the first four books had been preserved'? Is it true (p. 3) that 'Milton's theology is now of no living interest?' Bishop Welldon has a vital paper on *The Theology of Milton in The Nineteenth Century and After* for May, 1912 (71. 901-918). It is not quite proper to say (p. 9) that Wordsworth 'admired and cherished Dante.' Wordsworth is sometimes more, sometimes less, favorable toward him. In the year 1824 he wrote to Landor (*Letters of the Wordsworth Family*, ed. by Knight, 2,216): 'Pray be so good as to let me know what you think of Dante. It has become lately—owing a good deal, I believe, to the example of Schlegel—the fashion to extol him above measure. I have not read him for many years; his style I used to think admirable for conciseness and vigor, without abruptness; but I own that his fictions often struck me as offensively grotesque and fantastic, and I felt the poem tedious from various causes.' On p. 11 we read that Dante 'as a prophet of righteousness... has no peer since the time of the Apostles.' Dante himself, or any one who knows the Middle Ages, would take exception to the statement; Saint Augustine and the great Bernard certainly were his peers in this

regard. Mr. Sedgwick mentions (pp. 12, 13) Isaiah and Paul as writers one needs to know before reading Dante. They are obviously important; so are the Psalms; but if any Biblical author is singled out for the student of Dante, it must be Jeremiah.

If these allusions do not adequately characterize the book, one may add that the author approaches Dante with that Neoplatonic bias which in our day is common to amateur interpreters of poetry.

The Index (pp. 181-7) is not very full; for example, the reference to Wordsworth just noted, and references to other poets in the same connection, are not included. The little volume is not typographically so attractive as most of the publications of the Yale University Press, the print being small, and the words often crowded in the line.

There would be no harm in recommending Mr. Sedgwick's primer to the novice in Dante, were there not other and very good books of similar scope, easily attainable, by specialists in the subject. The recent *Life of Dante Alighieri* by Dinsmore (Houghton Mifflin) is better. So is Gardner's *Dante* (Temple Primers). It is a mistake in our author to suggest that he has been able to produce a more useful introduction to the poet because he is not a scholar—a mistake that is too frequently made in this country. How much more likely is Butler's *Introduction to Dante* to win the beginner; how well written it is! Even that would have been more effective had Butler been as adept in Dantesque scholarship as Moore. But doubtless the best introduction to Dante, at once popular and meeting the demands of present-day scholarship, is that of Toynbee (*Dante Alighieri, his Life and Works*, fourth ed., 1910).

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NOTES

Acknowledgment

As author of *Christianopolis, an Ideal State of the Seventeenth Century* I desire to make some acknowledgment of the space devoted to a review which appears in the July (1918) number of the *Modern Language Review*, and I feel obligated at the same time to respond briefly to the comments passed upon the monograph by Dr. G. C. Moore Smith, the writer of the review. I am all the more desirous of doing this because some correspondence was carried on by Dr. Smith and me while the book was in preparation, as a result of which Dr. Smith's edition of Bacon's *New Atlantis*¹ and one of his articles from the *Athenaeum*² appear in my bibliography.

¹ G. C. Moore Smith, Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis*, Cambridge Press 1909.

² G. C. Moore Smith, The Date of the *New Atlantis* (In the *Athenaeum*, Feb. 1900).